

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

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The recent policy of the United States Government of reducing the acreage under cultivation in order to limit the production of agricultural commodities and thus, by raising prices, restore the buying power which the producer enjoyed in more prosperous times, suggests the ancient Hebrew regulation which systematically took land out of cultivation. In the American instance, production of agricultural commodities was said to be in excess of consumption. To the extent that prices depend upon the relation of demand to supply, they seemed destined to continue at a low level unless production could be controlled. In the ancient practice, the legislation was directed toward making the people economically self-sufficient by avoiding the creation of a capitalist class and by safeguarding the original fertility of the soil.

The Hebrew institution of the seventh year of fallow for land is, from any viewpoint, an ancient regulation. Its place in the *Pentateuch* lends support to the belief that it was part of the legislation intended for the children of Israel upon their entrance into Canaan.¹ Even those who assert that the composite authorship and wide range of time in composition and redaction must be accepted grant that the first reference to the practice is found in the oldest Hebrew documents.² Apart from the literary and historical evidence, economic logic also supports the antiquity of the institution. The year of fallow and the practice of periodical redistribution of land is "Almost inexplicable if they be supposed to have originated at a late period of Hebrew history," and "they present no difficulty if we assume them to be the survival of a period through which every agricultural community has at the outset passed."³ It is reasonably certain that the

¹ *Leviticus*, 25:1-7.

² *Exodus*, 23:10-11.

³ John Fenton, *Early Hebrew Life*, 69-70 (London, 1880).

practice of fallowing land in some systematic way is much older than the Mosaic legislation and that it was not confined to the Hebrews but belonged rather to a stage of agricultural development. However, in the case of the Hebrews greater significance attached to the institution through its linkage to the system of sevens in time: the seventh day of rest for the individual, the seventh week of the calendar year for the Feast of Pentecost, the seventh month for the beginning of the civil year, the seventh year of rest for the land, and the close of the seventh seven of years to usher in a jubilee for the redistribution of land.

The earliest Biblical reference to the special significance of the seventh year had no connection with the year of fallow but merely stated that a Hebrew servant should be free after six years.⁴ Apparently each individual's service began when he was sold and terminated six years later, regardless of the relation of that date to the year of fallow. The earliest reference to the year of fallow itself provided that after six years of bearing in response to the owner's cultivation, the land was to lie fallow during the seventh so that the poor might eat and be satisfied, after which the beasts of the field might eat. The same provision extended to the vineyard and the olive grove.⁵

The chief Biblical account of the seventh year is contained in *Leviticus*, 25:1-7, 20-22. These passages leave no question as to the manner of spending the six years, plainly stating that they were to be used for fruitful labor and that the seventh was to be a year of rest for the land during which labor aiming at the production of crops was forbidden. Instead, the land was to lie fallow, and even the grain and fruit which grew naturally under the circumstances were not to be harvested but used from the fields by the owner, his servants, the stranger, the owner's livestock, and other beasts. A man might eat grapes from his neighbor's vines so long as he carried none away. He might pluck corn with his hand from his neighbor's standing crop but might not

⁴ *Exodus*, 21:2. Verses 3-11 amplify this simple statement. See also *Deuteronomy*, 15:12-18.

⁵ *Exodus*, 23:10-11.

use a sickle.⁶ The agricultural products of the six years were to be gathered and might be stored, but those of the seventh year were not to be used for profit. The regulation was humanitarian, if nothing more, but it presented other advantages to be discussed later.

The remainder of the chapter in *Leviticus* gives the provisions for the jubilee. Though the passages in *Exodus* contain provisions which undoubtedly came to be applied to the fallow year, now usually referred to as the sabbatical year, the verses in *Leviticus* furnish the principal basis for the later interpretations and elaborations.⁷ A release of debts owed by Hebrews to Hebrews was provided for the seventh year.⁸ The reading of the law at the Feast of Tabernacles in the sabbatical year, enjoined by Moses just before the close of his life, seems to be incidental to the original purpose of the observance of the fallow year.⁹ In actual practice the entire law was probably not read, unless it was in 426 B.C. when Ezra acquainted the people with its provisions so long forgotten or neglected.¹⁰ It is also probable that the reading of the law at the Feast of Tabernacles in 404 B.C. was in the shorter form referred to in the Mishna, and, since the covenant to observe the seventh year was associated with this reading, the shorter form was no doubt continued.¹¹

Because of its relation to the sabbatical year, the law concerning the jubilee should also be mentioned. Its principal provision

⁶ *Deuteronomy*, 23:24-25. See *Matthew*, 12:1; *Mark*, 2:23; and *Luke*, 6:1, for a problem that arose concerning this provision.

⁷ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3(12):3.

⁸ *Deuteronomy*, 15:1-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31:10-13.

¹⁰ *Nehemiah*, 8:8, 14, 17-18. It is clearly stated to be the first reading for many centuries. The dates of Biblical events are those given in the margin of *The Companion Bible* (Oxford, 1932). Since this article is not a critical study in chronology, dates are given merely for reference, but they are probably fairly accurate.

¹¹ *Nehemiah*, 9:3. According to the Mishna (*Sota*, 7:8), seven portions of *Deuteronomy* were read: 1:1 to 6:3; 6:4-8; 11:13-22; 14:22 to 15:23; 26:12-19; 17:14-20; and 17:27-28. The reading took place on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of the fallow year. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 9:201 (New York, 1880); *Nehemiah*, 10:31.

was concerned with the return of all people to the inheritance which had been assigned to their families when Canaan was distributed by lot.¹² There is a question whether the year of jubilee was to be observed after seven seven-year periods or was the last year of the seventh seven-year period. The literary evidence indicates that it was intended to follow the forty-ninth year.¹³ The slight historical evidence in the Scriptural account seems to imply that both the forty-ninth and the fiftieth years were intended to be fallow.¹⁴ A number of reputable Jewish authorities are agreed that the jubilee was the fiftieth year when in force during the time of the First Temple but that it was the forty-ninth or the seventh sabbatical year during the Second Temple when its observance was only nominal. There is no evidence that the jubilee was observed in more than name in post-exilic times.¹⁵ The fact that Hebrews considered their ownership of land a sacred trust would imply that their system of land tenure had very ancient sanction.¹⁶

The passages in *Leviticus* relating to the sabbatical year differ in terminology from other parts of the same book. Although the subject is the only one in the book which is introduced with a reference to Mount Sinai, three sections close in that manner.¹⁷ Apparently the spiritual regulations were associated with the tabernacle of the congregation, but the passage which deals with the moral or economic life of the people was appropriately associated with a secular place. What is now usually called the

¹² *Numbers*, 26:53-56. See *ibid.*, 32, 33:53-55; and *Joshua*, 13:15-32, 15:1-12, 16:1 to 17:11, 18:10 to 19:49, for references to this division. See also *Numbers*, 36:4, for the regulations which kept land within each tribe.

¹³ *Leviticus*, 25:10, 21-22. *Ibid.*, 23:15-16, relate to the Feast of Pentecost which was to be the fiftieth day; by analogy the jubilee might be expected to be the fiftieth year.

¹⁴ *2 Kings*, 19:29; *Isaiah*, 37:30. This was about 519 B.C. and is one of the few references which imply any observance of the sabbatical year before the exile. It should be noted that in the Septuagint, *Isaiah*, 37:30, seems to indicate only one fallow year. See L. C. Brenton, tr., *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament According to the Vatican Text*, 2:714 (London, 1844).

¹⁵ Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 10:606 (New York, 1916).

¹⁶ *Ruth*, 4:3-6, about 1300 B.C.; *1 Kings*, 21:3, about 800 B.C.; *Micah*, 2:2, about 600 B.C.; *Isaiah*, 5:8, before 500 B.C.; *Jeremiah*, 32:7-12, about 478 B.C.

¹⁷ *Leviticus*, 7:38. 25:1. 26:46, 27:34.

sabbatical year, in the Scriptures, is variously termed the seventh year, the year of release, the sabbath of the land, and the year of liberty, depending upon the idea to be emphasized in each particular passage.

The practice of letting ground lie fallow was general in ancient times. In some instances perhaps it was merely to rest the soil,¹⁸ but usually it was to conserve the moisture as in modern dry-land farming. Ordinarily the ground lay fallow in alternate years, but during the idle year it was cultivated not less than three times.¹⁹

The provisions for the sabbatical year relate to land, servants, and debts. The part concerning land merely stipulates that it should lie idle and that the trees and vines should remain unpruned during the seventh year. In view of the fact that the logical time for the commencement of this year of fallow was after the ingathering of crops it seems likely that it began on the first day of the month Tishri, or about the first of October. Were it to begin in the spring with the Jewish calendar year, two years without crops would necessarily follow in order to have a year of fallow, for the crops already in the fields could not be harvested and no sowing could take place the following fall. By letting the ground lie idle God's right of ownership was acknowledged in a manner which was of positive benefit to the land. The Hebrews were commanded to farm for six years, throughout which they were to gather produce into their storehouses. At no time, however, were they to glean their fields clean or gather all their grapes.²⁰ Undoubtedly the provision that mixed seed should not be sown was instituted so that there would be no question as to the purity of the flour used in the sacrifices.²¹

It may be questioned whether the spontaneous crop of a country would be sufficient to sustain its population for a year. How-

¹⁸ T. C. Williams, tr., *The Georgics and Eclogues of Vergil*, 25 (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), translating *Georgic*, 1:71-72.

¹⁹ E. C. Semple, *Geography of the Mediterranean Region*, 385-386, 402-403 (New York, 1931).

²⁰ *Leviticus*, 19:9, 23:22, 25:3; *Deuteronomy*, 24:19-21.

²¹ *Leviticus*, 19:19.

ever, there was no command against storing for the sabbatical year and thus diligence and thrift were rewarded. There was also a promise of a much greater crop in the sixth year,²² which could not be a result of natural causes since then the ground would be more nearly exhausted than at any other time in the seven-year period. Furthermore, there is at least one account in ancient literature of some such system. It is said that in early times there were many places in Albania where the land when sown once produced two or even three crops, the first a crop of even fiftyfold and the others coming up without additional plowing.²³ Though Palestine was not usually reputed to be an exceedingly fertile land, making allowances for the probable exaggeration of hearsay with regard to Albania, some return should be expected from natural seeding of grain left in the field.

The references in ancient literature to returns from seeding fall naturally into two groups: one, in which yields are about what would be expected from the same sort of soil today; and the other, in which they are so large as to be considered impossible by Ellen Churchill Semple.²⁴

In the former group is the statement of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.) referring to Leontine in Sicily, which reads: "On an acre of Leontini ground about a medimnus of wheat is usually sown, according to the regular and constant allowance of seed. The land returns about eightfold on a fair average, but in an extraordinarily favourable season, about tenfold,"²⁵ and that of Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 ? B.C.) who said, "the influence of the kind of soil in a district is so great that the same seed yields in some places ten-fold, in others fifteen-fold, as in several parts of Etruria."²⁶

²² *Ibid.*, 25:21.

²³ H. L. Jones, tr., *The Geography of Strabo*, 5:225 (New York, 1917-1932), translating *Geography*, 11 (4):2. Strabo lived from about 63 B.C. to about 24 A.D.

²⁴ Semple, *Geography of the Mediterranean Region*, 388.

²⁵ C. D. Yonge, tr., *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, 1:343 (London, 1921), translating *In Verrem, Second Pleading*, 3:47.

²⁶ Lloyd Storr-Best, tr., *Varro on Farming*, 92 (London, 1912), translating *Rerum Rusticarum*, 1:44. Semple (*Geography of the Mediterranean Region*, 388) is apparently mistaken in her statement which implies that Columella said that in his time only a fourfold return was received. What he said in the reference

Of the second group of references, in addition to Strabo, may be mentioned the Biblical comment, "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold."²⁷ Herodotus (484?-423 B.C.), referring to Mesopotamia, wrote: "This territory is of all that we know the best by far for producing corn . . . it is so good that it returns as much as two-hundred-fold for the average, and when it bears at its best it produces three-hundred-fold." He said, moreover, of Libya: "when it bears best it produces a hundred-fold, but the land in the region of Kinyps produces sometimes as much as three-hundred-fold."²⁸ Varro claimed that, "In Italy too, in the country about Sybaris, they say that the usual yield is a hundred fold, and in Syria near Gadara, and in Africa in Byzacium from one peck the return is likewise a hundred pecks."²⁹ In the parable of the sower, Jesus spoke of certain good ground which brought forth thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and even a hundredfold.³⁰ Caius Plinius Secundus (23-79 A.D.), better known as Pliny the Younger, stated that in ordinary years land in Byzacium yielded one hundred and fifty-fold. In another place he said that the Byzacium crop that yields so remarkably is common wheat.³¹

No references have been found to ancient yields so low as four-fold and fivefold. Cicero mentioned a yield of eightfold to tenfold in Sicily, and Varro tenfold to fifteenfold in Etruria. Against these Strabo spoke of a yield of fiftyfold in Albania, and there are two Scriptural references, separated by hundreds of years, to yields of one hundredfold in Syria with additional mention of

cited is that a return of one fourth of one hundred sestertii from a jugerum of land in corns could hardly be remembered. See Columella, *Of Husbandry*, 119 (London, 1745), translating 3:3. Her reference to the small yield reported by Cato the Censor (234-149 B.C.) has not been located.

²⁷ *Genesis*, 26:12.

²⁸ G. C. Macaulay, tr., *The History of Herodotus*, 1:95, 369 (London, 1918), translating 1:193, 198.

²⁹ Storr-Best, tr., *Varro on Farming*, 92-93, translating 1:44.

³⁰ *Matthew*, 13:8; *Mark*, 4:8; *Luke*, 8:8.

³¹ Philemon Holland, tr., *Pliny's History of the World*, pt. 1, p. 505, 564-565 (London, 1601), translating 17:5, 18:10. Semple's reference (*Geography of the Mediterranean Region*, 388) to Pliny, 18:55, does not give yield but merely the amount of seed of various grains to be sown.

sixtyfold and thirtyfold in the later instance. Varro mentioned a yield of one hundredfold in Syria near Gadara and in Sybaris, Italy and Byzacium, Africa. Herodotus said that Libya at its best produced one hundredfold and mentioned a yield of two hundredfold to three hundredfold in Mesopotamia and three hundredfold in Kinyps in Africa, and Pliny cited a yield of one hundred and fiftyfold for Byzacium.

There are only two references to small yields, and they refer to land in Italy and Sicily; to yields of fiftyfold or more there are ten extending over three continents, being mentioned by six authors—one Hebrew, two Greeks, two Romans, and one Hebrew writing in Greek. It is plausible, therefore, to presume that there is some truth back of the latter statements.

Data compiled by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture show that the average return from wheat in the United States for the period 1928-1933 was 862,645 bushels harvested from 85,126 bushels of seed, a little less than tenfold, and from corn, 2,522,065 bushels from 17,408 bushels of seed, or more than one hundred and forty-fourfold.³² These figures are well within the range of the more extravagant ancient claims.³³ While it is true that the corn of America was not known in the Old World at that early period, perhaps other grains of that time gave equally large returns. As the average yield per acre of wheat and corn for the same period, $14\frac{2}{5}$ bushels and $24\frac{3}{5}$ bushels respectively, is only about 11.3 percent of the maximum known yield of $122\frac{1}{2}$ bushels and 225 bushels, it is reasonable to suppose that with greater care considerable improvement could be made in returns from seed in the United States.³⁴ The returns reported from ancient times and the maximum known returns of the present time present a challenge to improvement of agricultural technique.

³² Work sheets in the U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

³³ O. W. Willcox, "The Real Farm Problem," *Economic Forum*, 2(1):35-36 (Winter, 1934). The maximum yields are from commercial fields that have shown profits above cost of fertilizer and other field costs.

³⁴ U. S. Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook*, 1934, p. 387, 414. As these tables show yields per acre by calendar years, it is necessary to use the figures for 1929-1934 to get the yields for the fiscal years 1928-1933.

The provision for the seventh year relating to servants aimed at periodical equality of opportunity for the people so that a man forced into servitude by reverses should again be free at the close of six years. If, however, he preferred to continue as a servant, he could have his ear bored with an awl as a token of his voluntary submission to lifelong bondage. In all cases the provision applied only to Hebrew servants.

It is not clear whether the regulation concerning debts implied merely a moratorium, since the debtors had no income during the sabbatical year, or meant the forgiveness of debts. In any case only debts owed to Hebrews were involved. According to the Talmud the laws respecting loans were not operative before the end of the sabbatical year, but the land release began with the year of rest.³⁵

It would seem that the sabbatical year was observed but slightly if at all early in the history of the Hebrews in Canaan. Although the wording of the commandment might imply that the year after entering Canaan should be the first sabbatical year, it is generally conceded that this was not the case, but that the first cycle began fourteen years later after the conquest and distribution of the land.³⁶ Thus the first fallow year would be the twenty-first after entering Canaan. Though it was predicted in the time of Moses that in case of a falling away and disobedience to God's commands the land should lie desolate until it had enjoyed its sabbaths,³⁷ there is no record in the books of the Old Testament that the land ever lay fallow one year in seven during the time which they cover. The references to the perpetual inheritance imply that rights to land were held sacred,³⁸ but there is no way of knowing whether the other regulations aiming at equality were carried out. The first definite expression, made not earlier than 518 B.C. and possibly much later, stated that the Hebrews should serve the King of Babylon for seventy years.³⁹ Again, not earlier than 489 B.C., Jeremiah

³⁵ Singer, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 10:605.

³⁶ *Leviticus*, 25:2; Singer, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 10:607.

³⁷ *Leviticus*, 26:34-35, 43.

³⁸ See footnote 17.

³⁹ *Jeremiah*, 25:11.

prophesied the return from captivity after seventy years.⁴⁰ Though neither of these references specifically mentioned the keeping of the sabbaths for the land, a later reference cited prophecies of Jeremiah as indicating that the reason for the seventy years of captivity was that the land might enjoy sabbaths.⁴¹ About 465 B.C., Ezekiel, in giving the organization of affairs for Israel's future time of glory, referred to the year of release for the land.⁴² So far as is definitely known, the only instance of an attempt to keep the provisions of the year of rest prior to the return from captivity was made about 479 B.C. when servants were liberated, but since their masters later took them back not even on this occasion was the law kept as originally intended.⁴³ Whatever the attitude of the Hebrews before the captivity, they came back from exile fully convinced that they could merit and receive God's blessing by observance of the sabbatical year and other commandments. Therefore, in 404 B.C., one of the pledges they made was to keep the seventh year, and apparently it was observed as strictly as possible from that time on.⁴⁴

The first secular account of the observance refers to events in 334 B.C., but it was written long afterwards. When Alexander the Great, direct from the capture of Gaza, approached Jerusalem, he was met by Jaddus, the high priest, in his purple and gold robes, the other priests in their fine linen, and the multitude arrayed in white. He was much impressed by the sight, remarking that he had seen the high priest thus attired in a dream some time before when he was exhorted to proceed at once in the advance against the Persians, and for this reason he revered the God whom Jaddus represented. When, in the Temple, the prophecy of Daniel that one of the Greeks should destroy the Persian Empire was shown him, Alexander supposed that he was the person meant, and on the following day asked the people what he should do for them. When the High Priest asked that

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29:10.

⁴¹ *2 Chronicles*, 36:21.

⁴² *Ezekiel*, 46:17.

⁴³ *Jeremiah*, 34:8-15.

⁴⁴ *Nehemiah*, 10:31.

they be allowed to enjoy the laws of their forefathers and pay no tribute in the seventh year, he granted the request and also that the Jews in Babylon and Media were to enjoy their own laws.⁴⁵

The Samaritans also met Alexander with splendor and enthusiasm a short distance from Jerusalem and invited him to honor their temple also. Upon his acceptance of the invitation for some indefinite future time, they requested that he remit their tribute every seventh year as they did not sow then. When they admitted that they were Hebrews but not Jews he promised to look into the matter on his return but did not make a definite commitment at this time.⁴⁶ There is no record that he ever granted the request.

In 163 B.C., both Bethsura and Jerusalem surrendered to Antiochus V (Eupator) of Syria because, as it was the sabbatical year, the ground was not cultivated and provisions were scarce. Moreover, many outsiders had moved in for protection, thus helping to consume the supplies that had been stored.⁴⁷ Immunities, probably including the remitting of the tribute for the seventh year, were promised to the Jews in 153 B.C. when Demetrius I, just before his defeat and death, made very generous promises which his son, Demetrius II, confirmed to Jonathan in 145 B.C. and to Simon in 143 B.C.⁴⁸ Although none of these charters specifically mentioned the sabbatical year, it was no doubt implied in them.

In 135 B.C., John Hyrcanus is said to have ceased besieging Ptolemy in Dagon because it was a sabbatical year.⁴⁹ He sent

⁴⁵ Probably *Daniel*, 8:3-8, 20-22; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11(8):5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11(8):6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12(9):5; and *2 Maccabees*, 6:49, 53. This was the one hundred and fiftieth year of the Seleucid era. See *2 Maccabees*, 6:20. The text used in this paper is that of Henry Cotton, *The Five Books of Maccabees, in English* (Oxford, 1832). His numbering of the books does not correspond with that ordinarily used. His Book 1 is commonly known as Book 3, Book 2 as Book 1, Book 3 as Book 2, but his Books 4 and 5 are usually known by those numbers. The dates of events in the Maccabean period follow Cotton, and as in the case of Biblical events, they are inserted merely for reference. However, they are probably relatively correct.

⁴⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13(2):3, (4):9, (6):7; and *2 Maccabees*, 10:28-45, 11:30-37, 13:36-40.

⁴⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13(8):1, and *Jewish Wars*, 1(2):4. The account in *5 Maccabees*, 20:17-18, does not mention the sabbatical year. At first the Jews

an embassy to Rome in 128 B.C. with requests for special favors for the Jews and the renewal of former pledges, which must have been granted the next year.⁵⁰ About 47 to 45 B.C., Hyrcanus, grandson of John Hyrcanus, sent ambassadors to Julius Caesar, asking the renewal of the former treaty with the Jews. Josephus gave an account of what is evidently the same transaction, but certainly his version of the edict is a composite.⁵¹ Although some of his text is very corrupt, the two passages which refer to exemption from tribute in the sabbatical year are apparently authentic.⁵² Immunities granted to the Jews by Alexander, Ptolemy, and Caesar are mentioned by Josephus.⁵³ In 37 B.C., Herod succeeded in capturing Jerusalem because of lack of provisions due to the sabbatical year. Their scarcity after the capture of the city is also mentioned.⁵⁴ References to the sabbatical year or to immunities of the Jews are also found in Josephus and in the Books of the Maccabees.⁵⁵

Philo Judaeus made several references to the sabbatical year.⁵⁶ Tacitus, an unfriendly critic who certainly would not invent the

refrained from fighting on the sabbath day and did not even attempt defense. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12(1):1, (6):2. Later they defended themselves on the sabbath day. See *ibid.*, 13(1):3. Still later they would not interfere with the engineering works of the enemy on the sabbath day. See *ibid.*, 14(4):2.

⁵⁰ *5 Maccabees*, 21:31-33, 22:1-7. Apparently the first agreement was made in 161 B.C. (*2 Maccabees*, 8:22-32) and was renewed in 144 B.C. (*2 Maccabees*, 12:1). Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13(9):2, evidently refers to the same transaction, though it differs in most details from the other account.

⁵¹ *5 Maccabees*, 44:1. Verses 4-17 give Caesar's reply. Though no mention is made of the sabbatical year, no doubt it was one of the concessions intended. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14(10):6.

⁵² Michel S. Ginsburg, *Rome et la Judée*, 100, 172-173 (Paris, 1928).

⁵³ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2(4). Caesar's pillar at Alexandria is mentioned in Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14(10):1.

⁵⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14(16):2, 15(1):2. *5 Maccabees*, 52:27, makes no mention of its being a sabbatical year, and 52:12 seems to imply that it was not; nor is the sabbatical year mentioned in an account of the same incidents in *Jewish Wars*, 1(18):2.

⁵⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 16(1):1, (2):3; *4 Maccabees*, 2:8.

⁵⁶ C. D. Yonge, tr., *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus* (London, 1854-55), "On the Ten Commandments," 3:172, "A Treatise on the Number Seven," 3:264, "On the Creation of Magistrates," 3:407, "On Humanity," 3:434. Philo Judaeus lived from about 20 B.C. to about 54 A.D.

idea of a year of rest, writing about thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. concerning the customs of the Jews, said: "They are said to have devoted the seventh day to rest, because that day brought an end to their troubles. Later, finding idleness alluring, they gave up the seventh year as well to sloth."⁵⁷ When Saint Paul said, "Ye observe days and months and times and years," he may have intended a reference to the sabbatical year.⁵⁸ The Talmud contains numerous allusions to it. After the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, some provisions of the law could not be observed for obvious reasons, and rabbinical enactments and interpretations released them from observing the sabbatical year. In the Zionist movement of today, the question has again arisen and is being met in the spirit of the ancient lawgiver.⁵⁹

So far as may be judged, the seventh year was not intended to be primarily a time for spiritual development, since no special feast or convocation was associated with it. The objectives were moral and economic values. However, providing for oneself during six years and then trusting God for the seventh would have a tendency to bring about greater reliance upon Divine beneficence at all times.

Apart from the spiritual implications of the sabbatical year, the curtailing of grain production necessitated a septennial reduction in the number of livestock which, by culling out the unfit, resulted in improvement in the quality of the remaining animals. Furthermore, the decrease in the quantity of grain reduced the tendency of the people to trade with neighboring countries and served to prevent the accumulation of unwieldy wealth. The people thus became more nearly economically self-sufficient and capable of meeting their own needs at all times. The year of fallow was also of unquestioned value to the land. Fallow is a preventive of exhaustion, weediness, and lar-

⁵⁷ W. Hamilton Fyfe, tr., *Tacitus' Histories*, 2:206 (Oxford, 1912), translating *Histories*, 5(4):3.

⁵⁸ *Galatians*, 4:10.

⁵⁹ Singer, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 10:607.

vae,⁶⁰ and in dry regions a conserver of moisture. Furthermore, although the original purpose of the observance of the seventh year seems to have been secular, the reading of the law had a tendency to draw the people back to a greater regard and reverence for God.

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⁶⁰ *Self-Interpreting Bible*, 1:405 (St. Louis, 1905).